

MESSAGE FROM ABSALOM.

Anne Armstrong Thompson. Simon and Schuster, \$7.95

Today's headlines being what they are, it is probably unfortunate that the damsel-in-distress heroine of this lush, romantic thriller is an ex-CIA agent. The terrifying scrapes into which she gets herself, however, from near rape and torture in Communist Bulgaria to being a hostage on a plane hijacked to the desert by Palestinian guerillas are just exactly the kind of thing a certain type of woman reader adores. When you add a handsome, enigmatic Russian KGB agent who alternates between being her rescuer and her pursuer you have at the least "a yummy read." It all begins when a CIA operative about to be killed smuggles her a code message with the admonition that she must take it to the President of the United States and trust no one else. That's just what our girl does, too, come hell, high water, evil Palestinians or wily Russians. [July 31]

THE DRAGONS AT THE GATE.

Robert L. Duncan. Morrow, \$7.95

The author of "The Q Document" offers here a book which is certainly headed for the best-seller list. The plot is a maze of dizzying twists and turns; the suspense is almost unbearable. Harry Calder is a middle-aged and disenchanted intelligence agent based in Tokyo. He's officially a technical advisor with the U.S. Government Accounting Office. Calder is approached by an Englishman, Wilkins, and offered a fortune to undertake a search for Japanese gold. This treasure is believed to have been sunk, as Japan was losing the war, by a fanatic war hero. Too late, Calder finds that Wilkins is a hireling of the CIA, bent on making the American agent the fall guy, an untrustworthy employee whom they can blame for a breakdown in negotiations between the Japanese and the Americans. The cold, calculating methods of the undercover agents seeking to break Calder's spirit and his hairbreadth escapes are rich fare for spy buffs. *The movie rights have been sold to David Merrick.* [August 27]

SCIENCE FICTION

BARNARD'S PLANET.

John Boyd. Berkley/Putnam, \$6.95

When a straying pulsar star wanders into earth's orbit in 1992, it creates a force field that makes interstellar travel possible at speeds faster than light. U.S. Navy doctor Lee Ashby is chosen to command the space ship, with a crew of four men and two women, all scientists of different nationalities. The destination is Barnard's Planet, eight light-years away. It looks like a beautiful place at first, but the bipeds there are less intelligent than the quadrupeds, and the trees and plant life have nerves and intelligence. It is not a good environment for educated humans

and the initial bickerings of the colonists lead to madness and murder for some of them and a little sexual dalliance for Ashby. This is a routine space travel story that generates little excitement and produces few surprises. [August]

NONFICTION

COUP D'ETAT IN AMERICA:

The CIA and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy. Michael Canfield and Alan J. Weberman. Third Press, \$11.95

If Congress, pursuing the challenges of this explosive book, supports what Canfield and Weberman have written, these two young men may yet become the Woodward and Bernstein of a more appalling coverup than Watergate. The authors weave a web of bizarre and astounding linkages—of fact, probability, circumstance and people—to support their theory: that Oswald was a CIA agent who was made the patsy for the JFK assassination by a CIA "assassination section" working with anti-Castro Cubans and the underworld, of whom Jack Ruby was a tool. Watergaters Hunt and Sturgis (Hunt CIA) are strongly suggested as deeply involved, and the possibility is raised that they were the "tramps" picked up and unaccountably released on the Dallas scene. Acetate overlay photos of them are included for comparison with the "tramp" photos. These combine with an exclusive interview with Sturgis and stunning research (there are 600-odd "notes," pages of facsimiles, 22 pages of photos) from Warren Commission, police and other sources to flesh out a book that could result in a re-examination of the Warren Report. *National ad-promo. Author appearances.* [July]

THE BIRTH OF AMERICA.

John Lewis Stage. Text by Dan Lacy. Grosset & Dunlap, \$25 to Feb. 1, 1976; \$35 thereafter

During his work for numerous leading magazines over the years, award-winning photographer John Lewis Stage developed an authentic "feel" for America's past, the land and the people. Here, through scores of beautifully reproduced full-page and smaller photos in color and black-and-white, he offers a marvelous and evocative visual panorama of life in Colonial America from Plymouth and Jamestown to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Stage divides his work into 10 panels, visually re-creating scenes and historic sites in old New England, the Middle Colonies and the South, showing the role of religion in colonial life and contrasting the elegant lives of "The King's Men" with the lives of the craftsmen and farmers among whom the independent-minded rebels sprang up to fight King George's armies. The romantic glow of history-by-hindsight does not invalidate either Stage's pictorial

achievement or Lacy's lucid and informed text. Index. [July]

CASALS.

Photographed by Fritz Henle. Amphoto, \$7.95

The ex-Life photographer's beautifully produced little photo-essay is both a visual lyric to the late cellist-conductor Pablo Casals and a final, intimate glimpse of the man that many will cherish. Henle was the guest of Don Pablo and his wife Marta at their home in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in early 1973, not long before Casals died at the age of 96. Here, with sensitivity and skill, Henle has put together the many photographs he made on that occasion—informal and candid pictures of Casals relaxing in his home or on his grounds, alone or with his wife, and superb portraits of Casals in total absorption, playing his cello. The mellow, sometimes somber humanity of the great cellist, so memorably caught in Henle's photos, is matched throughout by Casals' own words on his life and his dearest commitments: his art, his humanist credo. Design and graphics are exquisitely handled, with effective use of white-on-black. Casals' love song, "Tres Estrofas de Amor," written for his wife, is reproduced as a closing endearment. [July]

STREET CORNER CONSERVATIVE.

William F. Gavin. Arlington House, \$7.95

Discarding terms like "ethnic" and "blue-collar," Gavin introduces his categories of "urban conservative" (a worker with principles who is not even aware that he is a conservative) and "street corner conservative" (a person from the same class who becomes intellectually aware of his conservatism). Gavin grew up Irish Catholic in Jersey City in the 1940s, but service in the army and a college education diverted him from a blue-collar destiny. At Jersey City State College, he resented the brainwashing by liberal professors, until one night he saw William F. Buckley, Jr., on a TV talk show and realized that one could be educated and elite without being a liberal. When he is telling the story of his life, Gavin is sincere and interesting, but too often he digresses into sermonettes that sound like echoes of the *National Review*. He now commutes from a Virginia suburb to Washington, where he is an aide to Senator James Buckley. [August 1]

THE POWERS OF EVIL:

In Western Religion, Magic and Folk Belief. Richard Cavendish. Putnam, \$7.95

Previously the author of "The Black Arts" and editor of "Encyclopedia of the Unexplained," Cavendish is an unusual, even refreshing writer on the occult. A self-confessed "ultimate agnostic" on his subject, he brings a healthy skepticism rather than the fanaticism of the true be-